



Fresh Meals

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PUMPKIN SPOOKY DELIGHT

Pumpkins shine through spooky Halloween night but also star as a top dessert. Try combining the pumpkin with pecans and chocolate for a new tradition in holiday desserts.



Pumpkins have been cultivated in the Americas for about 9000 years. They were prized for their meaty flesh, protein and oil rich seeds which were an important nutritional source during the lean winter months.

Canned pumpkins are not entirely composed of American pumpkin but often include their close, less fibrous cousin, the hubbard squash. Canned pumpkin puree without sugar is not bad tasting and is very easy but the fresh real American pumpkin is the best bet for my taste. The fresh, cooked pumpkin has a bright, more delicate flavor with a certain clean, refreshing flavor that is lost in the canning process. Think of a canned potato compared to a fresh baked potato and you will understand the difference in flavor.

Go for a heavy, solid small pumpkin free of bruises and soft spots. Turn the pumpkin over and make sure that it is evenly ripened to that distinguishing, wonderful orange color. Check to insure that the stem is firm and dry.

I prefer to roast the pumpkin with spices for the best flavor. Cut your pumpkin into quarters and remove the seeds. Place on the lower half of a large sheet of heavy aluminum foil and sprinkle with your favorite pie spice blend. Fold the foil over, crimping the edges together to seal into a pouch or envelope. Place the pouch atop a cookie sheet for safe handling. Roast in a 400 degree oven

until tender, about 45 minutes to 1 hour depending on the thickness of your pumpkin. Remove and allow to cool.



Get rid of that extra pumpkin moisture for the best texture in your cheesecake. Spread the pumpkin puree across layers of paper toweling on a cookie sheet. Cover with additional layers of paper toweling, pressing slightly so that the excess moisture is drawn from the pumpkin puree.

Try the Pumpkin, Pecan and Chocolate Cheesecake for rich flavors on Halloween Eve.





PUMPKIN, PECAN & CHOCOLATE CHEESE CAKE

Makes 1 - 10 inch cheesecake

Makes 12 generous servings

Prep time 30 minutes / Cook time about 1 to 1-1/2 hours



CRUST

1/2 cup toasted chopped pecan pieces
(Substitute Graham Cracker crumbs)

2 tablespoons turbinado sugar

2 tablespoons melted butter

FILLING

2 pounds cream cheese

1-1/2 cup turbinado sugar

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground ginger root

2 cup unsweetened pumpkin puree, dried as described above

2 tablespoons vanilla extract

6 eggs

3/4 cup heavy cream

6 ounces sugar free Traditional Dark Chocolate

2 tablespoon unsalted butter

GARNISH

1 cup pecan halves, toasted

12 sprigs of fresh mint

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F.

In a medium bowl, combine the pecan pieces, 2 tablespoons of sugar and the melted butter. Transfer to a parchment lined and buttered spring form cake pan, 10 inches in diameter and at least 4 inches deep. Press the pecans evenly and smoothly across the bottom. They will be very thin. Wrap a 10" spring form pan from the bottom up the sides with a large single piece of foil which will protect against water leaking into the cheesecake while cooking.

In a large mixer bowl, beat the cream cheese. Sift together the remaining sugar and the spices. Add to the cream cheese, blending until smooth. Scrape down the bowl and add the pumpkin and vanilla, mixing well. While whipping, add the eggs one by one, allowing to thoroughly incorporate before adding the next. Scrape down the bowl and make sure the mixture is smooth. Pour into the pan.

Meanwhile, in a small bowl combine 4 ounces of the chocolate and 1 tablespoon of the butter. Place the bowl in a pot of almost simmering water until melted. Remove from the heat stirring until smooth and glossy. Pour the chocolate in a swirl pattern over the top of the cheesecake. With a spatula gently follow the chocolate pattern to assist the chocolate penetrating the batter. Place the cake in a roasting pan on the lower rack of the oven. Fill the water bath with boiling water 2/3rd the way up the cake pan. Bake until center is well set, about 1-1/4 to 1 1/2 hours. Remove from the water bath and allow to cool on a cake rack to room temperature. Refrigerate overnight to set.

To serve: Unmold the cheesecake from the pan. Artistically arrange the toasted pecan halves across the top of the cheesecake. In another small bowl combine the remaining chocolate and butter. Repeat the melting technique as for the cake. When ready, drizzle the chocolate across the top of the cheesecake. Garnish with the mint and serve.

Additional Recipes



From USDA's Recipe Finder Database:

<http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/schoolmeals/Recipes/recipefinder.php>

- Multi-Grain Pumpkin Muffins
- Pumpkin Muffins
- Pumpkin Pudding
- Whole Grain Pumpkin Muffin
- Sunshine Bars



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